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FIERCELY INDEPENDENT

## Making a Killing

Oil, militarization, and  
the "War on Drugs"

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## Quebec Rising

*"...Speak red  
We speak of education and social justice  
We speak of le rapport Parent  
and of la Révolution tranquille (the Quiet Revolution)  
the struggles of our predecessors  
for the achievements now being swept away  
We speak of the failures of our government  
we are a generation sacrificed  
but hungry for knowledge  
and a more just society  
where education is no luxury  
and when you really speak red  
when you get down in the streets*

*To speak of your ideals  
and speak of equity of opportunity  
and the Québec you would like to be yours  
a little louder then, speak red  
raise your second-class citizen's voice  
They're a little hard of hearing  
and live a little too close to the management  
and hear nothing but our breath from their ivory tower...*

*we speak the language of our generation  
as in England as in Colombia  
We express our anger clearly  
a red square bared in our teeth  
you you speak loudly you speak return to order you speak  
repression  
Speak red  
it's a universal language  
we are born to understand it  
in spite of your tear gas  
and in spite of your clubs  
Speak red...'*

EXCERPTS FROM CATHERINE CÔTÉ-OSTIGUY'S  
POEM "SPEAK RED," TRANSLATED BY AMY M.

The tenacity and vibrancy of the Quebec student uprising is delivering a wake-up call to the left across the country. On the dark side, in response to the success of the mass movement, we have seen draconian curtailments of civil liberties and the largest mass arrests in Canadian history, with over 3,000 people incarcerated and counting. This is the equivalent of three G20s, or seven October Crises. Police have beaten three young people into comas, two people have lost their vision, and countless others have been traumatized by police brutality.

But in counter-point to this repression, we have also borne witness to innumerable examples of courage, joy, creativity, and a staggering sense of community. The resurgence of a vibrant social movement has had a contagious effect, with people banging pots and pans in loud solidarity marches that have rippled across the country, and the world.

The risks people have been willing to take are directly correlated to how democratically students have structured their decision making bodies. In their article, "Spread the Red Square Everywhere," Alan Sears and Xavier Lafrance explore the importance of building democratic student unionism across the land, and the broader implications for movements fighting austerity.

The neoliberal tendency to regard education as a private commodity delivered to customers is reflected in the degree of vitriolic anti-strike rhetoric bleated out by corporate media. Students are castigated for refusing to passively receive their education, and their political engagement has been confined to placidly accepting the dictums of the government between elections.

Such ideologies ignore the radical, emancipatory potential of education as explored in Tyler McCreary's interview with popular educator Anne Doherty, who notes, "Nothing emphasizes the need for popular education more than the concerted conservative attack on communities today."

The effort of people to reclaim education in all spheres is one that must be spread. As Franz Fanon once said, "Every generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission and either fulfill it or betray it."

REBECCA GRANOVSKY-LARSEN, EDITOR/PUBLISHER  
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Paley



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Oja Jay



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# HARPER'S SMUDGE

## *Prison expansion on sacred Aboriginal grounds*

By Vernon Wilson

Illustration by Trevor Angus

Situated in Abbotsford, British Columbia, on unceded Stó:lō First Nations' territory, is a set of federal penitentiaries collectively known as the Matsqui complex. The prison in which I reside, the Regional Treatment Centre, is expanding to include an adjacent building. To make room for this expansion, the administration has decided to take away half of our Aboriginal sweat lodge grounds, relegating us – the Aboriginal inmates – to a corner of the area to practise our culture and spirituality.

We call the Aboriginal sweat grounds *Huli Tun*, a Hul'qumi'num phrase that, loosely translated into English, means "place of healing." It was at *Huli Tun* that I participated in sweat lodge ceremonies hosted by contracted Elders. In these ceremonies, I united with fellow men desiring to change their lifestyles, shared prayers and songs, and witnessed the healing of others. There I listened to the Elders speak about the seven grandfather teachings of love, honour, respect, honesty, bravery, truth, and wisdom. There I

dealt with the problems that influenced my criminal behaviour and developed a healing sense of what it means to be Gitksan in post-colonial times. It was in the sweat lodge, not in a prison, where I found treatment. Simply put, *Huli Tun* was where I learned a way of life other than the one that brought me to prison.

Today, as I sit on a wooden bench in front of the Regional Treatment Centre, I stare at the devastation reaped on *Huli Tun* by the construction crew, which has been working steadily for the past three months. I look through the



15-foot-high chain-link fence with razor wire wrapped around the top. "Out of bounds" signs are bolted on every fourth fence pole. Two peach-coloured John Deere excavators are parked on unbalanced terrain. These machines have dug 12 feet into the soil, creating narrow trenches and leaving several dirt

**Watching Harper awkwardly smudge himself, keeping up the appearance of cultural respect, I wished that we would have had the opportunity to smudge *Huli Tun* before the construction started, before it was converted from a place of healing into a place of warehousing more Aboriginal people.**

mounds. Five dusty, plastic, turquoise pipes have been erected in the soil, a mockery of traditional Coast Salish welcoming poles. Wooden stakes, which remind me of the kindling we use for our sweat lodge fires, are scattered about with fluorescent orange ribbons tied to their tops, marking off the digging zone. Above the trees, in the baby blue sky, I see the silhouettes of two eagles soaring slowly in circles over the wreckage. I look back down and notice a Canada goose waddling to and fro along the grass outside the fence, honking, I can only imagine, in protest. Taking in this insulting environmental scene, I realize that Prime Minister Harper's policies are not "tough on crime." They are only tough on the human spirit.

This past January, I sat in my cell and watched on television the Crown-First Nations Summit in Ottawa. During the opening ceremony, Prime Minister Harper stood between Assembly of First Nations National Chief Shawn

Atleo and the Governor General as an Elder smudged them individually. The smudge ceremony involves fanning over your body the smoke of burning sage, sweetgrass, and cedar as it emanates from an abalone shell. It is an act of cleansing that we practise every time we enter the sweat lodge.

Watching Harper awkwardly smudge himself, keeping up the appearance of cultural respect, I wished that we would have had the opportunity to smudge *Huli Tun* before the construction started, before it was converted from a place of healing into a place of warehousing more Aboriginal people. But we were not given this option. Now, we walk past a noisy construction crew that talks in obscenities as they hollow out the grounds and build the sewage lines. This is Harper's real smudge on Aboriginal spirituality – a dirty mark of Conservative politics, a dirty mark not televised for the Canadian public. But for me, and others who built a relationship with the land, it is a daily reminder of what Harper's true stance towards Aboriginal people is: disrespect and displacement.

This past week, fellow men and I helped our Elders build a new lodge out of willow sticks in the corner of the remaining Aboriginal sweat grounds. This is a spring seasonal tradition. After-

wards in his office, I asked the Elder who was at the site when *Huli Tun* was first created what he thought about the administration building another prison on the grounds. He nonchalantly replied, "We wondered how long it would be until they took the grounds away."

On a mental level, the expansion comes as no surprise. It is, in fact, to be expected. But on a spiritual level, it is nothing less than a shocking assault. Having *Huli Tun* fenced off and being placed on the edge of our own grounds triggers historical trauma with its accompanying anger, confusion, helplessness, and resentment. This is what we felt when, without our input and in defiance of our blockades, corporations drove in and clear cut the forests. What sustained my people in the face of such colonial attacks? I believe it could only have been an ancient memory confirming that we are a part of the land.

And so I keep my memory of my relationship with *Huli Tun* alive in my heart where it is safe from destruction. There is a healing in this place of memory. My past is no longer solely a reminder of why I'm in prison. Instead, whenever I mine this memory of *Huli Tun*, I recall the healing journey I started, the journey that will lead me, in a safe and good way, back home to my Kispix community. ⑥



At the Matsqui prison complex, Wilson drums by the site where *Huli Tun* (place of healing) is being destroyed.

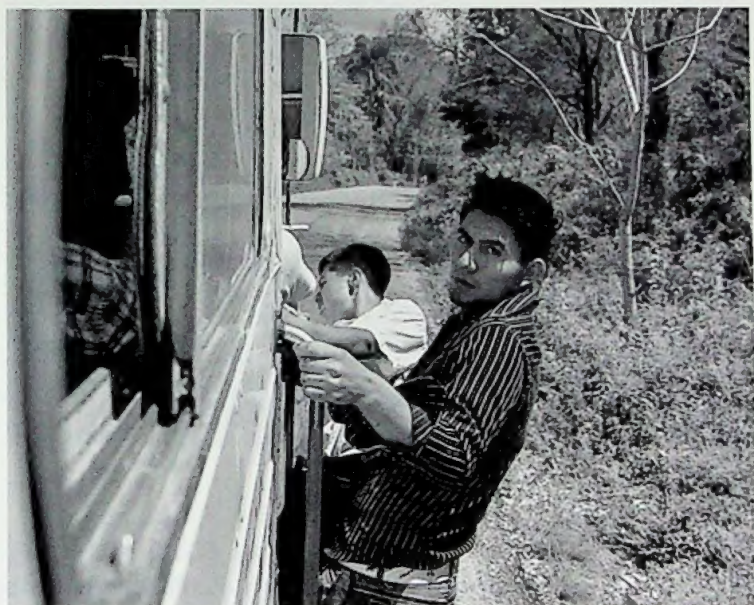


# The Spoils of an Undeclared War

*How Guatemala's 'War on Drugs' is being used as a front to clear land for oil companies*

By Dawn Paley

Photos by Murray Bush – Flux Photo/Vancouver Media Co-op



Young men hang on to the bus on a trip towards the Guatemala-Mexico border outside of Tenosique, Tabasco.



A man on horseback in the Lacandón National Park in Petén, Guatemala. The community of Nueva Esperanza was evicted from these lands by the police and army in August, 2011.

*I didn't go to La Libertad, Petén, for the fried chicken. I went because of the war.*

*That said, for three nights in a row I sat on the same plastic bar stool looking out over the main road through town and ate the best chicken I'd ever tasted. The cook, bills folded into her apron, kept watch over a huge, cast iron pan filled with dozens of legs and breasts frying under a generous portion of oil. Each night I was in La Libertad, I would venture out for fried chicken after dark, when the temperature settled down to a comparatively comfortable 30 degrees. From my spot at an outdoor table, I would sit, eat, and watch.*

*Everything seemed to happen at once: bikes and mototaxis stopped, started, and turned; women grabbed their children and dodged across the street; buses came and went; trucks blazed through at full speed. Even after dark, amid the traffic, people were selling mangos (ripe or unripe), dictionaries, drinks, and clothes. A group of pharmacy workers in white uniforms were getting off shift. One night, armed park rangers sat a couple of tables away and ate, but police and soldiers, a fixture on the main drag during the day, seemed to disappear after dark.*

*It feels so normal, I kept thinking to myself. It doesn't feel like war. And if La Libertad is known for anything these days, it's war. I expected some kind of tension, perhaps an unofficial curfew, intensive checkpoints, or convoys of SUVs with tinted windows.*

*Something.*



**G**uatemala is back in the news, and the news isn't good.

The Central American country is garnering more media attention as an emerging hot spot for organized crime groups. But while media coverage has focused on atrocities and the incursion of organized crime, a new oil rush is taking place in Petén, the same increasingly militarized northern area coveted by criminal groups.

In May 2011, the municipality of La Libertad was the site of the deadliest massacre in Guatemala since the 36-year internal conflict officially ended in 1996. Twenty-seven day labourers were killed on a ranch called Los Cocos. Most of the dead were Indigenous Q'eq'chi men. When authorities entered the ranch the day after the massacre, they found 26 bodies and 23 severed heads. "What's up, Otto Salguero, you bastard? We are going to find you and behead you, too. Sincerely, Z200," read a message in Spanish written in human blood on the side of a building beside the bodies, supposedly from a local cell of the Zetas.

Images of the carnage at La Libertad were posted online showing heads scattered in the grass and soldiers guarding decapitated bodies that had their hands bound, shocking the world and evoking memories of the darkest years of Guatemala's history when these kinds of events were almost commonplace in some rural areas. But unlike the old days, it wasn't men in government-issued uniforms doing the killing. This time, it was blamed on the Zetas, a narcoparamilitary group originally formed by Mexican special forces that deserted and joined the Gulf Cartel,



*A sign outside Perenco's oil refinery in La Libertad, Petén.*

from which they split in 2010.

"More than controlling the distribution chains and infrastructure needed to run the day-to-day operations, the Zetas are focused on controlling territory," reads a September 2011 report prepared for InSight Crime, a George Soros-funded think-tank. The report, based mostly on information from government sources and newspaper articles, points to the massacre in La Libertad as the first incursion of the Zetas into Petén. As far as can be proven, drug traffickers who identify as Zetas are active in Petén. Fox News even reported on a banner, hung in late March in the state's capital, threatening death to civilians in Petén and signed by Z200. Following the massacre, the government declared a state of emergency that lasted until January of this year.

To claim that Petén is Zetas territory, however, is to ignore other important interests in the resource-rich region, which is bigger than Belgium.

For one, there are established drug trafficking families in Petén who haven't ceded control of the lucrative transshipment market to the Zetas. But the armed groups with the most visible presence in the region are the Guatemalan police and army. They were an ever-present part of the daytime street life in the half-dozen cities and villages I visited there, driving around in the backs of pickup trucks or walking around in groups.

One morning, together with a photographer and a couple of locals, I visited the Lacandón National Park, which is also in the municipality of La Libertad. Hundreds of peasant families from the community of Nueva Esperanza were removed from the park last summer on the pretext that they were involved with narcotrafficking. We entered the park with a couple of community members, and it didn't take long before police armed with semi-automatic weapons arrived, recorded our names, and nodded approvingly when we made motion



to leave. Later, we were warned against entering the Laguna del Tigre Park because our presence at the various army checkpoints on the way into the park could create problems for the people we wished to visit.

Both of these protected areas are heavily militarized, and both are reported to be places where drugs are moved into Mexico. But they're also home to dozens of peasant communities and are among the areas of Guatemala with the most abundant natural resources. The events unfolding in Petén are much less familiar, but merit closer attention – especially from Canadians.

To get into the Laguna del Tigre National Park, you have to travel through El Naranjo, a busy frontier town bordering a river that flows to Mexico. While we visited, soldiers kept watch over the riverfront; rickety, wooden motorboats came and went; other armed men without uniforms stayed back under the shade of nearby shopfronts; and a small sign at the loading area displayed the logo of another powerful group operating in the area: Perenco.

Perenco is a Paris-based oil company that produced and exported over 3.6 million barrels of crude oil last year when oil displaced cardamom as Guatemala's fourth export, after coffee, sugar, and bananas. The firm operates 47 wells known as the Xan Field inside the Laguna del Tigre National Park, forming a footprint anyone with access to Google Maps can observe. The oil travels down a 475-kilometre pipeline, also owned by Perenco, which leads to the company's refinery near the town



*A man selling coconuts smiles for the camera in the riverfront town of El Naranjo, Petén.*

centre of La Libertad and then continues on to the company's terminal near Puerto Barrios on the Atlantic coast. Perenco acquired the operation from Canada's Basic Resources in 2001.

According to one local resident, who asked that his identity be concealed for fear of reprisals, the militarization of the area has more to do with protecting oil interests than it does with fighting organized crime.

"In the case of Perenco, it's a company that's providing financing for the army of Guatemala to install itself in the area," he said, pointing out that six small military bases and at least 250 soldiers, part of a green battalion, exist inside Laguna del Tigre. Some of these soldiers have taken part in forced evictions of communities living inside the park and are currently responsible for what

amounts to a state of siege for those still living inside. Not only are the 25 to 30 communities inside the park forbidden from cutting a tree without a permit, they are under constant pressure from soldiers and armed park rangers.

"First, the mere presence of soldiers is something that makes the communities feel uncomfortable because of the memory of the people, when they see a soldier, they see someone who is there to kill," said the resident, who travels regularly into the area. "Second, they built a military outpost on the road, 15 or 17 kilometres from here, from El Naranjo, where they are controlling everything that the communities bring into the park." He said soldiers prevent community members from bringing in provisions, work tools, and materials they need for their homes, like cor-



rugated zinc, cement bricks, sand, and rebar. "They're pressuring them by denying them access to things they need, which is another way of pressuring them so that they'll leave the area on their own," he said.

Perenco has deflected attention from their impacts on the park by stating on their website they "recognise the serious nature of the problems facing the Park, such as those caused by migrant communities [sic] illegal slash and burn farming techniques." The government of Guatemala also blames people living inside the park for environmental damage to Central America's largest wetlands. "I will not tire of saying that the biggest threats to the Laguna del Tigre Park are cows and not the pipes of



A fuel transport truck leaves Perenco's refinery in La Libertad, Petén.

## The Return of the Guatemalan Military

At the end of Guatemala's 36-year internal armed conflict in 1996, the military was ordered to scale down in size and mandate. With many officers holding on to influential political positions, however, the military was able to block significant reform and orchestrate a gradual return to power. There have also been important advances against impunity, including sentencing for wartime massacres and the trial of dictator General Efraín Ríos Montt, but these have been hard won alongside increasing military power.

1999

### FRG Elected

The Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), founded by former dictator General Efraín Ríos Montt, wins the presidential election under civilian candidate Alfonso Portillo.

Ríos Montt, responsible for the worst period of genocidal massacres during the war, is re-elected to Congress and remains head of the FRG.

### Military Reform Defeated

A referendum on measures recommended in the peace accords is defeated. Racist fervour against Indigenous rights recognition led the No campaign, but the military was able to hold on to legal responsibility for internal security in the process.

2000

### Return to Internal Policing

With their role in internal security affirmed by the defeat of peace accord reforms, the military heads back to the streets to take part in police patrols, anti-narcotics, and guarding prison perimeters.

2003

### Land Evictions

Since 2003, when soldiers took over the El Maguey farm, the military has participated in evicting land occupations and communities of small farmers from contested land. Among hundreds of cases, the military participated in the eviction of over 800 families from 14 communities in the Polochic Valley in 2011.

2005

### Anti-Mining Protester Killed by Troops

Soldiers shot into the crowd at a protest blocking mining equipment from reaching the Canadian-owned Marlin gold mine in San Marcos. One man was killed.

TIMELINE BY SIMON GRANOVSKY-LARSEN



Perenco company," said former president Alvaro Colom in 2010.

Ex-Petén governor Rudel Mauricio Álvarez claims that during his administration, which ended earlier this year, the choice was between oil or drugs. I met Álvarez in an open, modern café in Flores, the picturesque capital of Petén, following a Twitter exchange spurred by the word narcoganagería, or narcoranching, meaning large scale ranches used as cover for drug trafficking activity.

"That's the question. What's worse, what's more damaging: oil that only impacts the 450 hectares where the fields are, or narcoranchers who have 140,000 hectares?" he asked. "Everyone, the environmentalists and everyone else went against oil ... They make the real problem of the protected areas invisible," he said, pausing briefly before coming back to his own question. "The problem isn't oil extraction. The problem is narcoranchers."

No one I spoke to denied that Laguna del Tigre was part of a trafficking route where Colombian cocaine arrives on private airstrips and is then moved out to Mexico. Opinions differ on how involved the dozens of communities inside the park are with trafficking. Álvarez claimed most of the commu-



A young man stands near wooden boats used for transporting people and goods along the Usumacinta River in El Naranjo, Petén.

nities are invaders, funded by narcodollars. But unlike in parts of Mexico where the drug trade dominates, I didn't see a single showy SUV while I was in Petén. My source in El Naranjo said the narcos keep to themselves, flying in and out of the area, while the communities – many of which were settled by families displaced during the internal conflict – survive off of their basic crops of corn, beans, and squash.

One thing is clear. The presence of drug traffickers in Laguna del Tigre hasn't affected oil production. In fact, there's a renewed interest from oil companies in Guatemala's oil.

Over the past little while, a handful of Canadian oil companies have made their own moves into Guatemala. Calgary-based Quattro Exploration and Production, which is actively extracting oil in Saskatchewan, has

2006

2009

2010

2011

2012

#### State of Prevention, State of Emergency

Since 2006, the governments of Óscar Berger and Alvaro Colom have declared short-term measures to increase military control and limit constitutional rights.

Many of these were ordered in the department of San Marcos, where mobilization is strong against transnational mining and electricity projects.

Activists have denounced abuses under the measures.

#### Wartime Bases Reopened

President Alvaro Colom reopened a notorious military base in the Ixcán region where more than 100 massacres were committed during the armed conflict. The region is now important for a mega-highway project, and communities have organized against its construction. Other wartime bases have been reopened, as have new ones.

#### State of Siege

The first "state of siege," or martial law, issued since the end of the war was ordered in December 2010, ostensibly to combat drug traffickers in the department of Alta Verapaz.

A second of the decrees, which include the **suspension of civil liberties** and temporarily hand political control to the military, took place in the Petén in 2011.

#### Wartime General Elected President (2011)

Retired general Otto Pérez Molina, who oversaw counterinsurgent slaughter in the highlands, is elected to a four-year term as president beginning January 2012. Pérez Molina has asked to have the ban lifted on US military aid to Guatemala, in the name of the war on drugs.

The third instance of **martial law**—in Barillas, Huehuetenango in May 2012—made clear the government's intention to use military force to suppress social mobilization, when the military was ordered to shut down protests against a Spanish hydroelectric project.



acquired almost 350,000 hectares worth of oil concessions in Guatemala since November of last year. Their most recent acquisition is a concession block adjacent to Laguna del Tigre, itself within the Maya Biosphere Reserve. Other companies, like Pacific Rubiales and Truestar Petroleum Corporation, have also recently been active in Guatemala.

Oil is only one of the super profitable industries in Petén. An elite-driven megaproject known as Cuatro Balam proposes biofuels and large-scale agriculture in the south of Petén as well as increased spending on infrastructure for mass tourism, partially funded by groups such as the Inter-American Development Bank. Corporate-linked conservation groups, like the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society, continue to claim vast tracts of land as park. There is also the threat of new hydroelectric projects, five of which are proposed along the Usumacinta River which activists say would flood 35,000 people off their land.

Few, if any, of the profits from these illicit or licit economic activities will ever make it to Petén's poor majority. They remain the most likely to be displaced from the land they depend on for survival and the most likely to lose

friends and loved ones as the drug war escalates in Guatemala.

Amid all of this, Guatemala's new president, Otto Pérez Molina, a hardline former general who campaigned on a tough-on-crime policy, has made public calls for drug legalization. Some analysts believe that Pérez Molina, with his leading Patriot Party, which has an

Increased violence and paramilitarism, which have already reached staggering levels in Petén, are known side effects of U.S. anti-drug policy. "A 10 percent increase in U.S. military aid was associated with a 15 percent rise in paramilitary attacks in regions where there was a Colombian army base, compared to other regions,"

**According to one local resident, who asked that his identity be concealed for fear of reprisals, the militarization of the area has more to do with protecting oil interests than it does with fighting organized crime.**

important support base among soldiers and veterans, is between a rock and a hard place. To effectively interrupt the flow of drugs, he'd have to fight against his own: the army, long known to be enmeshed in the drug trade.

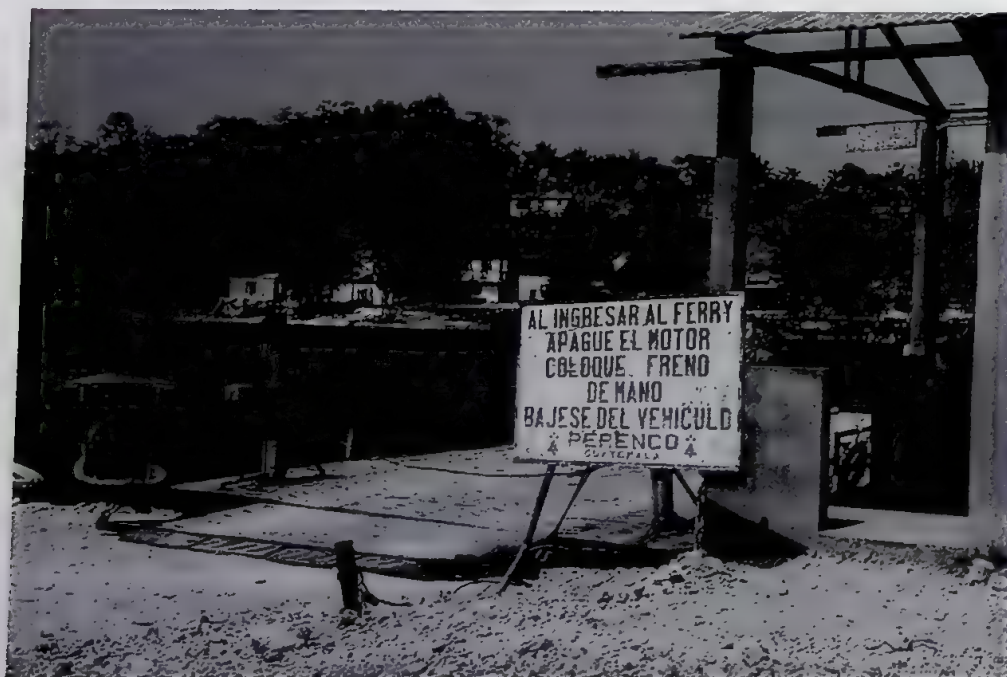
Regardless of Pérez Molina's rhetoric, Guatemala continues to arm more soldiers and police, supposedly to fight drug trafficking, following the U.S. State Department's strategy in the region. Stephen Harper announced in April that Canada would join the U.S. and Mexico in supporting a new drug-related security strategy in Central America.

stated economists, cited recently in *Foreign Policy* magazine.

Today, after more than a decade as a testing ground for U.S. drug policy – during which an estimated four million people were displaced, 50,000 disappeared, and thousands of political activists, dissidents, unionists, and environmentalists were murdered – Colombia has the fastest growing economy in Latin America.

The hard lesson from Colombia is that, unfortunately, drugs and oil do mix, and there's no longer any doubt that the policies tested out in Colombia are being applied in Guatemala. When Hillary Clinton visited Guatemala to announce funding for U.S.-led anti-drug initiatives in Central America last year, she was explicit that her government was applying strategies previously used in Colombia and Mexico.

"We need to keep in mind that Colombian President Santos, like Pérez Molina, wants to expand Plan Colombia, which doesn't just mean strengthening the fight against narco trafficking but actually means converting it into a form of paramilitarism in order to generate a new kind of counterinsurgency – not against social movements but against Indigenous communities," said Maximo Ba Tiul, a Mayan Poqomchi analyst based in Alta Verapaz. "It's the remilitarization of Guatemala as a patriotic project." **b**



The main dock in El Naranjo, a popular route for migrants leaving Central America towards Mexico and eventually the United States. The sign, paid for by French oil company Perenco, warns motorists to pull the emergency brake and exit their vehicles once they are on the barge.





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*« la grève est étudiante, la lutte est populaire, » chant striking students as they march through the streets of Montreal. (Roughly, "The strike is a student one, the struggle is a popular one.")*



# Spread the Red Square Everywhere

## *Why solidarity with the Quebec strike movement is crucial*

By Xavier Lafrance and Alan Sears

Photos by Federico Barahona

**T**he Charest government has turned to repression to try to break the largest and longest student strike in Quebec history. Students had already endured heavy-handed policing, including hundreds of arrests and attacks by riot cops on campuses and in the streets prior to Bill 78 – a brutal clampdown on the right to organize collectively and on freedom of expression.

At its height, the movement mobilized over 300,000 in strike action, some for a few days and others with an unlimited mandate. The strike was triggered by the Charest government's plan to boost tuition fees by 75 per cent over the next five years, which the government later changed to an 80 per cent increase over seven years in a so-called "offer" to students. The tuition hike is important as it normalizes the principle of user-pay post-secondary education, and thus forms part of the "cultural revolution" promised by Quebec Finance Minister Raymond Bachand to destroy the idea of public services as a social right. The introduction of a flat tax of \$200 for health services is part of the same agenda.

The strike movement has shown remarkable tenacity despite the repression, including brutal policing, threats of losing the school year, and the heavy use of injunctions to limit the right to protest on campuses. The Charest government has tried to break up the common front of student organizations, offering to negotiate with some groups while excluding others. But this has not worked.

The Quebec strike is part of a pattern of anti-austerity activism that has included the massive Chilean student mobilization and militant student movements in Britain and California, as well as uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, the Occupy movement, and anti-austerity strikes in Wisconsin and southern Europe. There will likely be more protests, as students have every reason to be angry at tuition increases, the declining quality of education and grim

job prospects upon graduation. Governments and employers are clear-cutting good jobs, slashing social programs and attacking migrant rights in the name of austerity, leaving post-secondary graduates facing debt and precariousness after an impersonal and often unsatisfactory education.

A poll published in the *Globe and Mail* on May 7 showed that 62 per cent of students across Canada said they would strike against tuition increases, including over 69 per cent in Ontario. The major obstacle to an upsurge in student activism elsewhere is not a lack of anger, but rather a lack of confidence in the idea that it is possible to fight the austerity agenda of tuition increases and major changes to education. The Quebec student movement has developed sophisticated political perspectives through a long history of mobilization that can contribute to rebuilding the confidence and capacity to fight elsewhere. There is much to learn from the model of democratic, activist student unionism that has played such an important role in galvanizing sustained militancy in Quebec.

### **The red square**

**A**ctive solidarity with the Quebec strike movement in the face of the Charest clampdown is crucial for students' and workers' struggles against austerity, as the Quebec government is targeting the right to organize collectively. This means spreading the red square everywhere. The red square is the pervasive symbol of the Quebec student movement, whether pinned to clothing or used as a graphic on signs, leaflets, culture jams or websites. It was first used during the 2005 student strike, and it cleverly plays on the idea of debt ("carrément dans la rouge" means "squarely in debt") and militancy (red is associated with radical activism). It is not only the symbol itself that has been passed down from the last strike, but also important strategies for effective and demo-





*Some marched, others pirouetted.*

cratic mobilization learned through the history of Quebec student activism since the 1960s. At the core of this strategic vision is the idea of democratic, activist student unionism.

The current strike is the ninth general strike in the history of Quebec's student movement since the 1960s. The strikes have varied in overall strength and effectiveness, and student activists have made conscious efforts to learn from these experiences of success and failure. The first of these general strikes was in 1968, and that mobilization demanded free tuition, the expansion of the francophone university system and democratic administration of educational institutions and policies. The demand for quality, accessible and democratic public education was connected to Québécois struggles for national self-determination and French-language rights. The English-language education system in Quebec was at the time far more extensive and much better funded than the French-language system. The idea of quality, accessible French-language education was part of a broader agenda for liberation.

The student strike also drew strength from the rising wave

of labour militancy sweeping Quebec in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Quebec students also consciously learned from the model of the French student movement dating back to the *Charte de Grenoble* in 1946, which asserts that students are intellectual workers with distinct and common material interests (for example, for quality, accessible and democratic education), who have the collective power and responsibility to fight for social justice. The commitment to student unionism modelled on workplace trade unionism represents an orientation to collective strength through organization.

Militant activism, then, has played an important role in forming the Quebec student movement, so that general membership meetings and mobilization committees are written into the bylaws of many local student unions. The demand for free education also has a long history in Quebec. Tuition was basically frozen after the 1968 strike until 1990 through a series of campaigns that included general strikes. Though there was a significant fee hike in the early 1990s, Quebec students have continued to mobilize effectively, and as a result they pay considerably lower tuition than the





Provincial riot police confront thousands of striking students in Quebec City in early March, blocking access to the steps of the National Assembly where students had planned to gather and firing tear gas to disperse the crowd.



A wall in downtown Montreal, painted red, reads "Merci de ne pas lâcher," or, "Thank you for not giving up."



rest of North America. The history of this movement also means that the idea that education is a public service with an important social role and not a product for sale on the market has considerable currency in Quebec society.

In 2001, the student activists who launched ASSÉ (l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante) engaged with the history of the Quebec student movement to try to develop a strategic perspective for effective mobilization. Some had been active with MDE (Mouvement pour le droit à l'éducation), which had fallen apart after a failed strike mobilization in 1998. ASSÉ developed a democratic activist approach to student unionism that proved successful in the 2005 student strike and again in 2012, where ASSÉ formed a broader coalition called CLASSE (Coalition Large de l'Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante.)

### **Collective interests, collective power**

**T**he core of democratic activist student unionism is the recognition that students, like workers, have collective interests – like quality accessible public education – and a potential for collective power that needs to be organized to be effective in defending these interests. This kind of student

**The slogan “make the student movement into a social movement” recognizes that the struggle for quality, accessible, and democratic public education is integrally linked to struggles for worker rights, against poverty, for feminism, and for quality public services.**

unionism depends on finding ways of fighting collectively around immediate and local issues as well as challenging government policies. Solidarity is at the core of this collective power, both within the student movement and with other allies in social movements.

The potential collective power of students can only become a real force when students have developed capacities to analyze their situation, communicate with each other, and act in concert, confident that others will also join the fight. Governments and university administrations will only really pay attention to student unions that have mobilized and knowledgeable memberships willing to take action to back up demands.

The General Membership Meeting (GMM) plays an important role in this process, as it puts transparent collective and democratic decision-making at the core of the student union. Here, students gather to debate and pass motions to establish the direction of their union. The

GMM also elects and supervises delegates to Quebec-wide congresses that coordinate overall campaigns. The GMM is a rich and challenging venue, where activists must engage their fellow students, listen to counter-arguments and attempt to persuade others that mobilization is necessary and possible.

The scale of these meetings varies on different campuses. In some places, student unionism is organized around specific departments, schools or faculties, while in others it is campus-wide. ASSÉ did not invent the GMM, which is written into the constitution of many student unions as a result of the long history of militancy in the Quebec student movement. Rather, ASSÉ developed mobilizing strategies that used the democratic decision-making of the GMM as a key component of campus activism.

The slogan “make the student movement into a social movement” recognizes that the struggle for quality, accessible, and democratic public education is integrally linked to struggles for worker rights, against poverty, for feminism, and for quality public services. Students have marched in solidarity with locked-out Rio Tinto Alcan workers and made many important connections with others fighting the Charest government. In the period between the 2005 strike and the current one, a number of labour unions had passed motions to support the idea of free education. This solidarity-oriented perspective could be enhanced by a richer and more integrated anti-racist and anti-colonialist analysis that could guide both the activism and demands of the movement for transformation of the education system. It is a hopeful sign in this direction that CLASSE recently came out with a strong statement about the centrality of anti-racism and decolonization in the struggle.

Finally, it is important to combine immediate struggles around tuition hikes with broader efforts to defend education as a public service, in part by fighting to democratize and decolonize the post-secondary system. The Quebec student movement has raised important questions about democratic oversight of post-secondary institutions and opening up the process of establishing spending priorities. Students must be full participants in discussions about effective teaching, research priorities and institutional governance, though they must be very careful not to be trapped into co-administering cutbacks or being pitted against other campus workers, whether staff or faculty. The fight against tuition increases must ultimately be a battle to transform post-secondary education, and the radical wing of the Quebec student movement has been working towards a broader agenda for change.

### **Spreading the movement**

**I**t is impossible to conjure up the long history of the Quebec student movement elsewhere to create instant activism. It is possible, however, to apply the strategies of democratic activist student unionism in ways that fit local conditions and experiences. The spread of the democratic activist student unionism can make a real difference as students and educa-





Some 40,000 striking students and their supporters march through downtown Montreal on April 14th, 2012, demanding a moratorium on the tuition fee increases introduced by the government of Jean Charest.

tion workers elsewhere organize to resist ongoing tuition increases and widespread restructuring that decrease the quality of education. Furthermore, the Quebec movement itself would benefit from the strength of solidarity, both within Quebec from a more active mobilization of workers and community activists, and elsewhere in Canada and around the world.

Indeed solidarity is crucial in the face of the Charest clampdown. Anyone interested in the right to organize, free political expression, or challenging austerity – on campuses or off – must actively support the Quebec students in their resistance to repression and in their struggle against the fee hike. The Charest government and the media throw the fact that Quebec students pay lower tuition than students elsewhere in Canada or North America in the face of this strike movement all the time. In reality, Quebec students pay less because of their long history of resisting tuition hikes and fighting for democratic, accessible and quality educa-

tion. The Quebec government is clearly determined to push Quebec tuition upwards toward the higher levels elsewhere, and will try to do so until student movements in the rest of North America begin to roll back those outrageous increases and push towards free tuition.

As we mobilize effective solidarity in the face of the Charest crackdown, we need to spread the red square everywhere. This does not mean simply pinning the symbol of the movement on our clothing, though that is great. Nor is it sufficient to pass resolutions condemning repression in Quebec, though that is absolutely necessary. Rather, we need to work towards the democratic activist student unionism that can galvanize the collective power of students and connect it to the struggles of workers and others fighting the austerity agenda. ⑥

*A longer version of this article was originally published on the New Socialist webzine. It has been adapted and reprinted with the permission of the authors.*



# BOILING POINT

## THE STATE OF (UN)SAFE DRINKING WATER IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES ACROSS CANADA

The 1,300 people in Eabametoong First Nation in Ontario have had unsafe drinking water for more than 10 years. They are advised to not let any water touch their mouths unless it is boiled, and warned not to bathe their infant children except when using a sponge. They are not alone.

The lack of safe drinking water in First Nations communities is just one example of the long-standing underfunding and neglect that has led to the substandard living conditions that plague First Nations communities across Canada. More than one in every six First Nations has a drinking water advisory (DWA) in effect. Several have been in place for over a decade, and most for at least a year.

Since 2006, the government has spent over \$1 billion to replace aging water infrastructure and train staff to operate it, often privatizing the water systems by working with businesses to create public-private partnerships, which have been criticized as quick-fix solutions. But the funding has not been enough to address the enormous scope of the problem, which has grown worse over time. As some communities have been taken off the list, more are added.

This map is based on the drinking water advisories in 121 distinct communities within 110 First Nations found in a Ministry of Health report from January 2012 that was obtained through an access-to-information request. While the document indicates that advisories can affect as little as one building, the vast majority have significant impacts on the community.

ALEXIS CREEK FIRST NATION has had a boil water advisory in place since 1999, and was hit with a second one in 2003.

DURATION: 4,658 days (12.5 years)  
AFFECTED: 290 people

WHITEFISH LAKE FIRST NATION has had a boil water advisory in place since May 2011.

DURATION: 221 days  
AFFECTED: Between 1,000 and 5,000 people

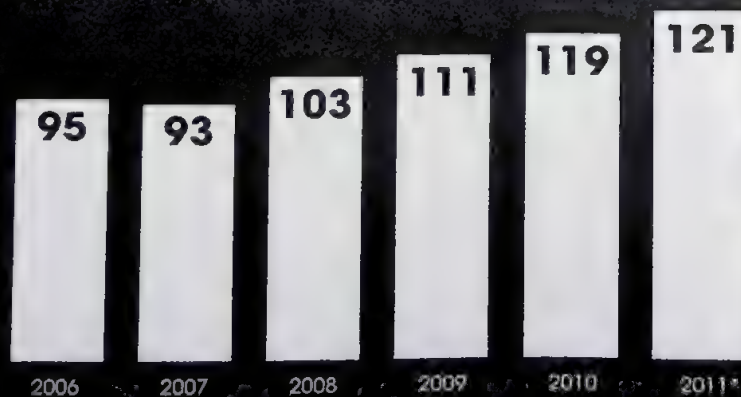
TSUUT'INA FIRST NATION has had a boil water advisory in place since June 2011, due to E. coli found in the water.

DURATION: 202 days  
AFFECTED: 600 people

EABAMETOONG FIRST NATION has had a boil water advisory in place since 2001

DURATION: 3,805 (10 years)  
AFFECTED: 1,041 people

### NUMBER OF DRINKING WATER ADVISORIES (DWAs) IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES



\*from January 2012 document (research was undertaken December 2011)



*POUNDMAKER FIRST NATION has had a boil water advisory in place since 2003.*

*DURATION: 3,027 days (8 years)  
AFFECTED: 174 houses, 1 public building*

*POPLAR RIVER FIRST NATION had a boil water advisory in place in December 2011 due to a pipe break in a filter line.*

*DURATION: 11 days  
AFFECTED: 1,200 people*

*In 2005, 800 members of the KASHECHEWAN FIRST NATION were evacuated when E. coli was found in drinking water.*

*PABINEAU FIRST NATION has had a boil water advisory in place since 2005.*

*DURATION: 2,405 days (6.5 years)  
AFFECTED: 70 people*

*KITILAN ZIBI has had a do not consume order in place since 1999 due to naturally occurring uranium content in the water.*

*DURATION: 4,524 days (12 years)  
AFFECTED: 400 houses*

*TEVENAGA MOHAWK TERRITORY has had a boil water advisory in place since 2003.*

*DURATION: 2,998 (8 years)  
AFFECTED: 625 people*

*FIRST NATION AFFECTED BY A DRINKING WATER ADVISORY (DWA)*

*FIRST NATION AFFECTED BY A DO NOT CONSUME ORDER*

*FIRST NATION COVERED IN THIS STORY*

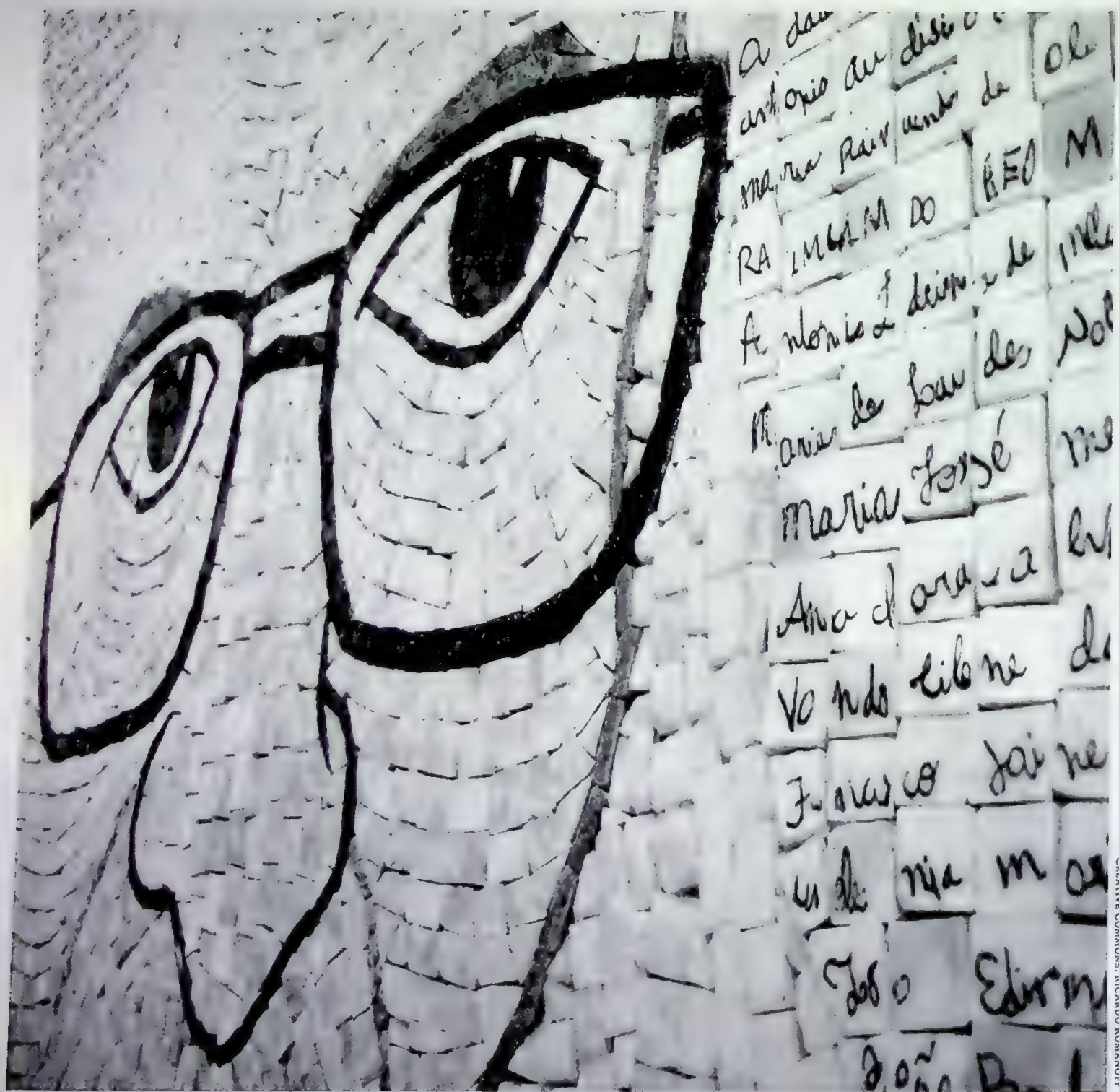
## DURATION OF ONGOING DWAs



**121**

**NUMBER OF FIRST  
NATIONS COMMUNITIES  
WITH DWAs**





CREATIVE COMMONS: RICARDO ROMANOFF

"MANY OF THE FORMATIVE THINKERS IN POPULAR EDUCATION WERE INFLUENCED BY LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND AN ANALYSIS OF COLONIALISM. WORKING TO HELP BRAZILIAN ADULTS READ AND WRITE, PAULO FREIRE RECOGNIZED THAT TEACHING WAS NOT SOMETHING TEACHERS DO TO STUDENTS BUT PART OF A CO-OPERATIVE PRACTICE IN WHICH BOTH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS LEARN TOGETHER. AS FREIRE EXPRESSED IT, THE OPPRESSED MUST BE OUR GUIDES TO LIBERATION." — ANNE DOCHERTY



# POPULAR EDUCATION LIVES

## *Harnessing education as a tool for community empowerment*

Interview by Tyler McCreary

*Anne Docherty is a popular educator based in the Upper Skeena region of northwest British Columbia on the traditional territories of the Gitxsan. Originally from Scotland, Anne came to work in British Columbia's north where the Gitxsan still constitute over two-thirds of the population of 6,000 living on their lands. Sitting down with Briarpatch, Anne reflected upon the formative influences on her understanding of popular education and how she uses popular education as a framework to advance decolonization and regional self-determination.*

### **How did you first learn about popular education?**

I first learned about popular education as a child through the activism of my parents. I grew up in a working-class Catholic family in Scotland. I first learned about citizenship activism and standing up for people's rights and responsibilities going to meetings with my parents.

We grew up organizing through the Catholic church for both cultural survival and resistance. In my family, we had a strong sense of cultural identity and resistance to British domination. Liberation theology was a major influence in the church I grew up in, and the oppression of poor Catholics by British elites was a central concern.

Although we didn't call it popular education, the Catholic community used the tools of popular education to build community and resistance. Learning to look at life in a political frame was foundational to how we understood ourselves. Our recreational activities were framed by our politics: running summer camps for Catholic youth was political education work. Political learning was immersed in everything we did.

When I went to university, I already had an established commitment to decolonization and anti-poverty activism, but going to school gave me the language to name these politics. I did an internship at Sorbonne University in France in the '70s and learned about the Theatre of the Oppressed. This gave me a frame to understand popular education and how it fit within movements for social justice.



Anne at her office.

TYLER MCCREARY





*The Learning Shop is the informal education centre run by the Storytellers' Foundation.*

### **Could you describe the approach of popular education?**

Popular education begins with recognition that the people most affected by issues should be the ones designing the solutions. Many of the formative thinkers in popular education were influenced by liberation theology and an analysis of colonialism. Working to help Brazilian adults read and write, Paulo Freire recognized that teaching was not something teachers do to students but part of a co-operative practice in which both teachers and students learn together. As Freire expressed it, the oppressed must be our guides to liberation.

It is also important to remember that Freire's literacy work was political. In Brazil in the 1960s, literacy was a requirement to be able to vote. Teaching people to read and write was a political project, enabling people to vote. Popular education was not just about literacy but a frame for political empowerment. More than providing people with skills, popular education supports people's political engagement.

Applying these insights to theatre, Augusto Boal developed the Theatre of the Oppressed. Like Freire, Boal first developed his approach in Brazil. But by the '70s, the Brazilian military regime had forced him into exile, and he ended up relocating to France where he taught at the Sorbonne. Boal led the program I took. He used theatre techniques as a means of constructing political knowledge. The Theatre

of the Oppressed works to activate the participants and audience to explore and transform the reality in which they are living.

### **How did you get involved in popular education in Hazelton in northern British Columbia?**

I began working in Hazelton at the Catholic school and came to realize that the school here did not share the liberation theology and popular education frame of my experience and training. After a short stint in the public school system, I came to the conclusion that the transformative frameworks I had been grounded in did not exist within the formal education system here.

I started working with the local community college and then the Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Education Society to create more community-driven education. This led me to doing education work for the Gitksan chiefs' office.

In the 1980s, the traditional hereditary chiefs of the Gitksan and neighbouring Wet'suwet'en launched a court case known as Delgamuukw, claiming title and jurisdiction of their traditional territories. Although the court case did not resolve their claim, it forced the government to recognize them and begin a treaty negotiation process.

With the Gitksan chiefs' office, my job was to go with a



Gitxsan colleague and organize meetings to explain how the Gitxsan governed their territories through their traditional house groups. I spent hours sitting with chiefs learning about traditional forms of organization and working to translate popular education techniques to a Gitxsan cultural context. For instance, the chiefs would call Galts'ep feasts in each of the Gitxsan communities to explain treaty. Drawing upon Gitxsan processes provided a framework of traditional protocols to approach difficult conversations in the community.

Recognizing that the majority of Gitxsan people are young people, we also began to look at how to link Gitxsan traditions to youth culture. Using experiential education on the land, we helped Gitxsan youth become engaged in their communities. Combining Gitxsan politics with popular culture, we also created new ways for youth to express their Gitxsan identity through art and fashion.

Through my work, I began to learn more about the meaning of popular education. Doing popular education involves observing the natural ways that communities learn and teach and validating those ways of learning. This not only allows communities to engage in difficult learning but serves as a vital means of cultivating citizenship. It provides an opening to articulate the rights and responsibilities of community members.

#### **How did you link your work around Gitxsan self-determination to a broader conversation about regional self-determination?**

One of the major barriers facing the Gitxsan was government's lack of willingness to consider alternative possibilities to the prevailing model of development and governance. Government policy privileged large-scale resource development led by multinational corporations. The institutional structure did not have the necessary adaptability or flexibility to incorporate recognition of Gitxsan governance and the territorial rights and responsibilities that Gitxsan people hold.

There was a desire to create an enabling environment for regional self-determination. This meant we needed to bring Gitxsan people together with settlers to build a respectful interface between their different cultural systems. On this basis, we hoped to develop cross-cultural connections in the community and press for a change in government policy.

In the mid-'90s, based on the success of our work among the Gitxsan, the chiefs encouraged a group of us who had been doing popular education to engage with non-Gitxsan people. We formed the Storytellers' Foundation to support local people self-determining in culturally diverse ways.

#### **What kind of approach did you use at Storytellers'?**

At Storytellers', we focused on how learning can facilitate building active and engaged citizens. When we approached literacy, we understood literacy as an essential tool for people, but in the political Freirean sense. Literacy is not

just a skill. It is an awareness of your world and a political engagement. Literacy education for us is about making sure that people have the tools to control their own lives and that communities are empowered to determine their own future.

#### **How has your work with Storytellers' evolved over the years?**

The work evolves because the work is organic. We have had an active praxis, constantly reflecting on our work and being involved in research activities. This has continually deepened our understanding of citizenship and the community.

Our work responds to different moments in the community's life. And the community continually changes because of shifting internal dynamics and also external pressures. But the central aspect of our work has always remained building the capacities of individuals so they are empowered to control the decisions that affect them.

With the closure of the local forestry mills, we have worked on building resiliency to industrial restructuring. With climate change, we have worked to increase sustainability and adaptability. Through listening to local people, we have learned about the close links between food and citizenship. We did not start doing work with food, but as we learned more about people's connections to local foods, we began to recognize its centrality to regional citizenship and self-determination.

#### **How do you continue to link your work to popular education and social justice campaigns in other places?**

Over the years we have had different projects often involving research, training, or advocacy that connect us to allies. But we do not limit our connections to a project. We sustain relationships over time to build links of solidarity.

We continue to share resources, stories, and people – we do learning exchanges – and this helps us continue to learn about alternative economic models and processes for community development. For instance, we have been linking people in our region with Bolivian activists, sharing experiences and building a network of social solidarity.

#### **What do you see as the relevance of popular education today in both the North and more broadly in the world?**

Nothing emphasizes the need for popular education more than the concerted conservative attack on communities today. Years ago we were concerned about how the globalization of an individualistic consumer culture would destroy our understanding of our rights and responsibilities as citizens. Now this has happened. It is visible in the shift to educating people as consumers rather than citizens.

We need community spaces now more than ever. For democracy to be meaningful, we need to reclaim what it is to be citizens. We need to talk about our rights and responsibilities. We need popular education. ⑥



# Fernwood celebrates 20 years of incubating radical ideas

By Chris Benjamin

Book fair, awards show, or publishers' banquet, Errol Sharpe is there with white beard and slicked-back ponytail, dropping quips that land with a thud. Since 1991, Sharpe has run Fernwood Publishing, a national small press swimming in an industry dominated by big fish.

"The commitment was always to publish and sell progressive books that challenge the status quo," Sharpe says. Riches don't drive him, but opportunity does. He started out in Toronto, selling leftist books to academia in the '70s. He noticed good, but radical, book proposals getting consistently rejected. "We began to publish the proposals that publishers did not."

Sharpe started Fernwood soon after moving from Toronto to Halifax. It has since moved to Black Point, a coastal village in Nova Scotia. Fernwood opened a Winnipeg office in 1994 with Wayne Antony, who says joining the publisher was a political act. "We try to be politically active in other ways, from [how] we raise our children to being involved in alternative organizations."

Fernwood maintains a radical, co-operative perspective. "I have come to see several of the other independents not so much as competition but as comrades," Antony says. The competition – politically not financially – is big-box book production and sales.

The small company has had a significant impact, providing a unique opportunity for books that otherwise might sit on the author's hard drive or imagination. "We often publish books that we don't expect to make a profit if we feel it's an important book," says Beverley Rach, who runs Fernwood's literary imprint.

As a result, Fernwood is a bit of an incubator for radical ideas, publishing many first-time authors who'd otherwise have difficulty publishing research that challenges conventional wisdom.

**"Our books bring hope and analyses that point to a new society."**

**– Errol Sharpe**

With more than 300 titles that significantly challenge mainstream thought, Fernwood is often quoted and referenced and is recognized as a major contributor to small-p political thought. Rach is tickled whenever she recognizes Fernwood writers' ideas creep their way into big-P political platforms. But Fernwood is strictly non-partisan and fiercely independent. In that spirit, it supports other independent publishing ventures with its advertising dollars, which go to magazines such as *Canadian Dimension* and *Briarpatch*.

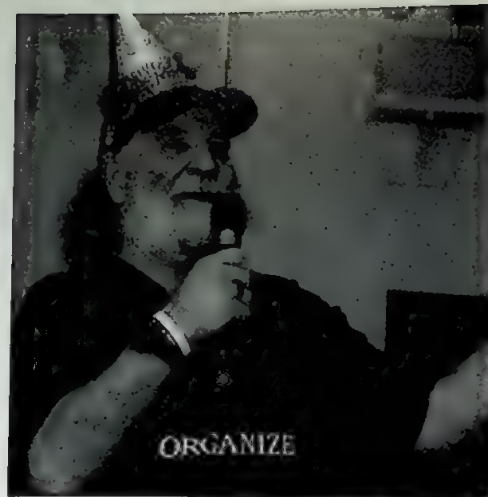
These are some remarkable accomplishments considering the enormous challenges faced by any small business, particularly one going against the grain in an industry where the money is funnelled into the pockets of few. Small markets, poor wages, and too great a workload for too few people have been challenging from the start.

Emergent technology has also brought challenges, but Sharpe says that threat is overblown. "All the surveys say people still prefer the printed book. Its death is wishful thinking by those who want a non-thinking population."

Antony agrees, but he acknowledges that the medium may shift to e-books. "People will still write stories and others will want to read them. Keeping up ... and figuring out how we will move into a more non-print era takes a lot of time and energy." And these happen to be their scarcest and most overtaxed resources.

But the greatest challenge is the demise of independent bookstores. "The majority [of stores are] owned by Chapters in Canada," Rach observes. "It dictates terms that make it almost impossible to sell through them."

Amazon is equally difficult. Fernwood



Errol Sharpe celebrating his (and Fernwood's) birthday

is one of the few companies that refuses Amazon's demands for enormous discounts. But slaying Goliath takes more than a young king with a slingshot; it takes organization. Fernwood has begun talks with some booksellers and other publishers about developing an online alternative.

Fernwood is also going beyond its academic markets, hoping for greater flexibility to be radical. "We publish great books on important issues," Rach says. "But because they are written for a university audience they are often inaccessible." Enter the company's About Canada series, giving radical national histories on health care, child care, and human rights issues.

Fernwood's 2006 acquisition of Roseway Publishing is another step in the right direction. Fiction was a new venture, but experienced freelance editors like Sandra McIntyre in Calgary filled the gap. Roseway gives literary writers the opportunity to explore themes without being dismissed as didactic. That imaginative jolt is something the left needs. "There is wide dissatisfaction among many people with the society we live in," Sharpe says. "Our books bring hope and analyses that point to a new society."

More concretely, Fernwood has given hundreds of visionaries a voice they'd otherwise lack, taking financial risks many publishers avoid. "It's neat to see so many other books reference Fernwood books," Rach says. "We're definitely building a new body of knowledge." ①



# Ban the Blood Services Ban

*Activists challenge the prohibition against gay blood donors*

Story and Photos by Hilary Beaumont



*Dalhousie student Nick Shaw takes a break outside the planning school where he is completing his master's.*

The first and only time he gave blood, Nick Shaw felt like a hero. The Canadian Blood Services (CBS) advertised a clinic at his high school with posters, announcements over the PA system, and in-class talks by teachers and nurses. Blood donation was touted as a moral imperative. Lots of high school seniors planned to do it.

The 17-year-old saw it as a chance to contribute to some greater good.

At the clinic, Shaw completed a questionnaire and entered a private booth where a nurse asked him more questions about where he had travelled and whether he had tested positive for HIV or AIDS. Then she asked him, "Have you

had sex with a man, even one time since 1977?"

The blood rushed to his cheeks, and his heart started to race. "No," he quickly said.

His high school near Hamilton, Ontario, was brimming with homophobia. Shaw had accepted his attraction to men, but he didn't plan to act on his feelings, and he certainly wasn't going to tell anyone he was gay. He knew if he had sex with a man, he would be banned from giving blood.

Since the early 1980s, the blood service has maintained a lifetime ban against males who have sex with other males (MSM), phrased in such a way to exclude men based on behaviour rather than sexual identity. A man who has had





sex with another man since 1977, even once, cannot donate blood because Canadian Blood Services contends these men are at a higher risk of contracting HIV.

Statistically, they're right. Several studies from the U.S. and Canada confirm MSM donors are a higher risk group, and though the blood service tests every donation, they say HIV tests are never 100 per cent sure. Based on the same argument, Health Canada does not accept MSM organ or sperm donations.

Recently, though, the blood service decided to revisit its policy toward MSM donors. The organization is now looking into a five-to-10-year deferral period rather than a lifetime ban.

"I would hope that if we get permission from Health Canada to do this, we should be able to implement the change early in the fall," says Dana Devine, CBS's vice-president of medical, scientific and research affairs. "Hopefully [MSM donors] will be able to see this as step one down the path of getting to a better place."

### 'Who you are is wrong'

Years later, while he was completing his bachelor of science degree at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Shaw's phone rang. It was a woman from the Canadian Blood Services calling for his roommate, who wasn't home.

She engaged Shaw in conversation. He mentioned his blood type, the rarest kind: AB negative. They had a pleasant chat about giving blood and Shaw's future plans, but then he asked her, "What about gay men and donations?"

"Have you had sex with a man, even one time, since 1977?" she asked.

"Yes," Shaw replied truthfully.

The warmth left her voice. She told him he was barred from donating and she would remove him from the registry. He asked if there were any policy changes coming up. She said the CBS was always revisiting their policy. Their conversation ended abruptly, leaving Shaw with feelings of disappointment and sadness.



**"To be told by a large organization that there is something wrong with you, it pushes on a sore spot in a lot of homosexual men, as it would with anyone. They're reminded that the thing they're fighting and struggling with the most is acceptance of themselves, and they're told that [being gay] is not acceptable."**

When he commented on the ban in 2010, Shaw said the policy confirmed at a deeper level that society sees something wrong with him because he is gay. He still feels that way.

"You tell yourself and people tell you that who you are is wrong, that you're not good enough, and there's something wrong with you," he says. "That's a fundamental fear that a lot of people carry, especially homosexuals."

### **History of the ban**

**T**oday's controversy began with an urgent decision 27 years ago. In charge of Canadian and American blood donations in the 1980s, the Red Cross did not properly screen donors. When the HIV-AIDS epidemic struck North America, thousands of blood recipients were infected with the virus and hepatitis C.

A wave of lawsuits hit the service. The Red Cross reacted in 1985 by banning blood from MSM donors in the U.S. and Canada. Back then, HIV was the gay plague, the gay cancer. Those who contracted it died within two years. In 1998, because of the scandal and to avoid political interference, Canadian Blood Services was formed as a separate and arm's-length organization from Health Canada.

The path to change hasn't come without a fight. CBS's decision to revisit the ban comes after a high-profile End the Ban campaign by several advocacy groups and a court case that challenged the policy.

In June 2002, former York University student Kyle Freeman sent an anonymous email to CBS admitting he lied in the pre-screening tests and gave blood regularly as a sexually active gay man. In the email he condemned the policy, arguing that it discriminated against him. Claiming their screening process was "purposefully compromised," the blood service went to court to find out Freeman's identity from his Internet service provider. They claimed he put their patients at risk.

Freeman did not have HIV or AIDS, though one of his blood donations did test positive for syphilis. He said he protected himself and blood recipients by using condoms during sex. He waited six months before donating blood if he had an experience that put him at risk of contracting the virus, he said, and got tested. Current HIV tests detect the virus after three weeks. He said he adhered to the outdated precaution to make a point.

The CBS sued Freeman for negligent misrepresentation. Freeman filed a counterclaim against the CBS and Health Canada saying he experienced "humiliation, degradation

and marginalization" from the MSM screening question. He claimed the lifetime ban on blood from gay men violated his Charter right to not be discriminated against based on his sexuality.

"It's 2010," he told the *Globe and Mail*. "It's so saddening to see our government so hell-bent on discriminating against people."

Justice Catherine Aitken held Freeman liable for \$10,000 in damages that the blood service had spent to trace the donations he made over a 12-year period. In her ruling, Justice Aitken found the Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not apply to the CBS since it's not a "government actor" and does not implement any specific government policies. The Charter, she wrote in her 188-page ruling, does not protect or promise a right to give blood.

"The Charter does not (and never was intended to) govern 'private' or non-governmental action," writes Sean Foreman, a partner at Wickwire Holm in Halifax, in an email. "However, this does not mean that CBS can simply 'discriminate' against certain groups in all matters."

Human rights codes and legislation still apply to the CBS's private actions in terms of employment or hiring, he says, though they may not apply in accepting blood.

Though merited in the 1980s considering the scientific mystery shrouding the virus, Justice Aitken concluded in her ruling the lifetime ban "goes well beyond what current science suggests is necessary to protect public health." She suggested the ban be reduced to a deferral period of 10 years.

### **Crafting a fair policy**

**W**hile Justice Aitken acknowledged there is no scientific basis for continuing the lifelong ban on MSM donors, Foreman doesn't think she achieved a fair balance between protecting public health and equal rights for gay men.

"Regrettably, she was not willing to move beyond a restrictive test and application of the Charter and to move beyond the safety arguments put forth as a red herring to disguise old stereotypes and assumptions on the sexual practices and health risks of gay men," writes Foreman, who is also a past chair of the Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project and the Canadian Bar Association's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Conference.

"In her ruling Justice Aitken specified that there is 'no scientific justification for the 33-year deferral of men who have had sex with men,'" Foreman added. "This statement reinforces the Canadian Federation of Student/Egale/



Canadian AIDS Society call for the deferral policy to be removed and replaced with a policy that identifies high-risk behaviours. The shift to a behaviour-based question would, according to top researchers identified in the ruling, lead to a safer blood supply."

For the new CBS policy to be fair, Rebecca Rose, activist and Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) representative, says it must take other risk factors into account, such as safe sex practices, various risk levels for different sexual interactions, and the donor's relationship status.

The CBS invited Rose to present to its board about the ban two months ago. She told them the deferral period should be the same as that of heterosexual donors.

"What I tried to drive home was that really a five-to-10-year deferral period isn't much different than a ban. Because if you think about it practically, what that would mean is a sexually active queer man, or a man who's had sex with other men, would have to abstain from sex for five to 10 years if they wanted to donate blood, which I think is unrealistic and unfair."

Devine says the organization's screening process isn't subtle enough to take those behaviours into account.

"The first important thing to change is the paradigm of infinity to something that's time based," she says. "That's a big change, and we have to start somewhere."

### 'Follow the science'

Shaw is out now. The 24-year-old is in his first year of a planning program at Dalhousie University. He says the school has a welcoming, inclusive environment. Four of the 10 guys in his class are out too. He still struggles with his sexuality, but less so now.

"To be told by a large organization that there is something wrong with you, it pushes on a sore spot in a lot of homosexual men, as it would with anyone. They're reminded that the thing they're fighting and struggling with the most is acceptance of themselves, and they're told that [being gay] is not acceptable.

"But that's not something I want to mix up with logic. That's something I have to deal with myself, and it's not necessarily the place of the blood service to deal with the emotional battle a lot of homosexual men are going through."

Shaw likes the idea of the more nuanced behaviour-based risk assessment proposed by the CFS. He also appreciates the CBS's goal of time-based deferral, but he says a five-to-10 year policy would exclude gay men unless they are celibate. The final policy should consider the higher risk factor of MSM donors, Shaw says, even if that means his demographic is deferred for longer than heterosexuals.

"Follow the science and don't let the emotion get into the decision-making," he says. **b**

*A shorter version of this story originally appeared at [www.openfile.ca](http://www.openfile.ca)*



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# NGOs AND EMPIRE

*From abetting coup plotters to shielding mining companies from bad PR – Canadian aid agencies take their role as junior agents in imperialism seriously*

By Nikolas Barry-Shaw and Dru Oja Jay

On November 30, 2009, the Conservatives fired the opening salvo of a far-reaching assault against Canadian development non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The concerted campaign to shift the political centre of the NGO world began when the head office of KAIROS Canada received a phone call from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) notifying the church-based development NGO that its request for funding had been rejected. CIDA officials cryptically informed the organization that its \$7.1 million in federal funding had been cut because its activities did not fit the agency's development priorities. It rapidly became clear, however, that KAIROS had run afoul of Stephen Harper's foreign policy priorities, most notably his Conservative government's staunchly pro-Israel stance.

NGOs guilty of similar transgressions soon faced cuts as well. In December 2009, Alternatives – another NGO critical of Israel's occupation of Palestine – learned that its \$2.1 million in CIDA funding would be cut. In April 2010, over a dozen groups concerned with women's rights, including development NGOs such as MATCH International and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), also suffered funding cuts. MATCH International (\$400,000 in CIDA funding in 2009) and the IPPF (\$6 million in 2009) had been critical of the Harper government's anti-abortion stance internationally. For the targeted organizations, the loss of government funding meant between 40 per cent and 75 per cent of their annual budgets disappeared overnight. The cuts exacted a heavy toll: overseas programs were shut down, offices were closed, staff positions were eliminated, and properties were liquidated.

The spate of funding cuts was part of a broader effort to silence development NGOs. According to the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), an umbrella

group representing most of the major development NGOs in Canada, many NGOs received veiled warnings about taking positions that conflicted with Ottawa's on issues such as climate change, free trade with Colombia, or the Middle East. "NGOs are being positively invited to remain silent on key questions of public policy," explained then CCIC president and CEO Gerry Barr. The wave of cuts, Barr said, was "a messaging operation to the entire sector which essentially says, in billboard fashion, 'Watch out what you say. You may pay a high price for it.'"

Fear rippled through Canada's development NGO community. "In conversations that we have had with other NGOs, it has of course created a chill," KAIROS's now -retired executive director Mary Corkery reported. "There is fear of being in support of Palestinian people and groups, who essentially are struggling for land and livelihood." When journalist Tim Groves asked Corkery which groups were feeling this pressure, she responded, "The chill is such that

people don't want to be named." Several NGO leaders anonymously told the *Globe and Mail* that they had received subtle warnings from officials that the government disliked their public stances, but they were too frightened to speak out publicly. Shortly after the CCIC publicly complained that the government had created a "chill" in the NGO community by adopting "the politics of punishment ... towards those whose public views run at cross purposes to the government," it too had its

three-year, \$1.7 million CIDA grant cut.

The KAIROS cuts and their aftermath revealed uncomfortable truths about the relationship between the Canadian government and development NGOs. Contrary to their image as free-floating atoms of altruism, NGOs are actually tightly intertwined with the state. Over the years, NGOs' coffers have been filled by ever-increasing amounts of public funding, which has produced organizations that are profes-

**With the typical development NGO now reliant on federal funding for over 50 per cent of its annual budget, NGOs have steadily lost their institutional autonomy and are increasingly subject to the politics and priorities of the Canadian government.**





sionalized, bureaucratic, and dependent on a continued flow of government money. With the typical development NGO now reliant on federal funding for over 50 per cent of its annual budget, NGOs have steadily lost their institutional autonomy and are increasingly subject to the politics and priorities of the Canadian government. The government possesses “unusual life and death power over many Canadian NGOs,” former CBC journalist Brian Stewart remarked in the wake of the cuts. “In today’s Ottawa, all NGOs know a simple fact of life: displeasing the government means CIDA can turn off your NGO tap with ease, either by simply eliminating the flow or diverting it to another group that the government favours.”

Canada’s development NGOs, in other words, are not quite as non-governmental as they seem, and with politicians holding the purse strings, these NGOs face serious limits on what they can do and say. Harper’s cuts, however, did not provoke a sober reappraisal of the distortions and restrictions that accompany government funding. Instead, the cuts occasioned an attempt to breathe new life into old fantasies about Canadian benevolence and NGO independence.

#### Canadian exceptionalism

When it comes to international affairs, Canadians tend to believe in a kind of Canadian exceptionalism. While other western countries might have self-interested foreign policies and aid programs, Canada – and Canadian aid in particular – is somehow different. In particular, Canada’s traditions of quiet diplomacy and UN peacekeeping are often contrasted with the aggressive, arrogant, and self-interested foreign policy of the United States. Canadians overwhelmingly embrace such flattering characterizations of our international role. In June 2005, a Pew Global Attitudes Project survey of 16 western nations confirmed the widespread belief in Canadian exceptionalism: “Canadians stand

out for their nearly universal belief (94%) that other nations have a positive view of Canada.”

To win public opinion to their side, leaders of the defunded NGOs appealed to this shining, Pearsonian vision of Canadian foreign policy. Specifically, the NGOs claimed that by cutting off funding to their organizations, the government was engaging in a dangerous politicization of CIDA, which had historically managed development aid in a disinterested, nonideological manner: “[I]f in fact the decision was a

**Hearkening back to a pre-Harper paradise lost allows the NGO leaders to maintain the pretense that their organizations were untainted by government influence until now.**

political one, then that is very disturbing for the integrity of Canadian aid,” Corkery told journalists after KAIROS lost its funding. Michel Lambert, executive director of Alternatives, made a similar point when he claimed the motives for the cuts were strictly “ideological” and had “nothing to do with development or humanitarian aid... It’s precisely to prevent humanitarian issues from becoming issues of foreign policy,” Lambert wrote in response to losing funding for his organization, “that the Canadian government created CIDA in 1968.” Canada was a global good guy, disinterested and fair in its dealings with the South – at least until Harper came to power.

Yet, as political scientist Todd Gordon explains, this vision of Canada was never accurate. “Canada isn’t some mere middle power riding the coattails of our superpower neighbour ... Canada has always had a self-interest to promote; Canadian capital has always had a controversial presence in the Third



World, whether in banking in the Caribbean, manufacturing in apartheid South Africa or mining in General Suharto's Indonesia. But the neo-liberal era, with heightened competition among multinational corporations and the aggressive market liberalization imposed on the Third World by the North (including Canada) has seen an unprecedented international expansion of Canadian capital."

Canadian foreign policy is not exceptional, nor is Canada's development aid program insulated from less-than-benevolent motives. Despite 40 years of justifying development aid on humanitarian grounds, writes Canadian foreign policy expert Cranford Pratt, "most scholarly commentators have concluded that humanitarian considerations have played little role within government in the shaping of those policies." In one of the earliest studies on the subject, historian Keith Spicer described Canadian aid policies as designed "purely in the selfish interest of the state ... Philanthropy is plainly no more than a fickle and confused policy stimulant, derived exclusively from the personal conscience. It is not an objective of government. Love for mankind is a virtue of the human heart, an emotion which can stir only individuals – never bureaucracies or institutions ... Altruism as foreign policy is a misnomer, even if sometimes the fruits of policy are incidentally beneficial to foreigners."

#### Quiet glories of a pre-Harper golden age?

In addition to betraying our historic international role as an even-handed diplomat and peacekeeper, the Harper government was accused of violating another hallowed Canadian tradition: respect for NGO independence. Lambert claimed the Harper government had disrupted the "symbiosis" between CIDA and development NGOs and pleaded for officials to recreate the "authentic partnerships" of the past, which had respected the independence of development NGOs. Michael Casey, executive director of Development and Peace, worried that the defunding of KAIROS and Alternatives threatened to disturb the "healthy environment of critique" that once existed between NGOs and the government. "This has always been encouraged in an open spirit of dialogue between government and civil society over the last 40-odd years."

Political commentator Gerald Caplan argued that the "punishment politics" meted out against NGOs were a betrayal of quintessential Canadian values. "The issue here is the reversal, by Stephen Harper, of a 60-year consensus shared by all previous governments about the central role of civil society in Canada. Every previous government has funded civil society groups and NGOs even when they espoused policies that contradicted the government's own. Governments might have done so grudgingly and not as generously as some of us hoped. But it has been one of the quiet glories of Canadian democracy that our governments have often backed groups that criticized them or had competing priorities."

The accusations of his critics notwithstanding, Harper



CREATIVE COMMONS: GOODMAN

was in fact not breaking new ground. If anything, his Conservative government's actions were in keeping with Canadian traditions. Liberal and Conservative governments alike have a long history of practising the "politics of punishment" against dissident NGOs. In 1975, the CCIC faced funding cuts after it criticized Canada's position at the World Food Conference. In 1979, a radicalized Canadian University Service Overseas, the most prominent Canadian development NGO at the time, had its funding shut off completely. In the 1980s, NGOs supporting liberation movements of southern Africa and Central America were squeezed by CIDA. In 1991, the Inter-Church Fund for International Development, a precursor organization to KAIROS, faced CIDA's wrath for its criticisms of structural adjustment. And in 1995, Canada's national network of development education centres was effectively destroyed when CIDA slashed 100 per cent of its funding.

Neither the "60-year consensus" nor the "40-odd years" of government-NGO "dialogue" and "critique" ever took place. Ruling administrations of the past have disciplined NGOs that dared to contradict the government's international stance, often just as ruthlessly as the Harper government. The Harper cuts were merely the latest example of Canadian governments using their power over CIDA funding to narrow the political space available to development NGOs. What was surprising was just how little the victimized NGOs did to draw the ire of the government. The left-leaning advocacy of KAIROS and Alternatives was meek in comparison to the militant, confrontational approach of the radicalized NGOs targeted by CIDA in the 1970s and 1980s.

The historical amnesia of the NGO leaders and their allies is politically convenient. There is little doubt that they know the history of past funding cuts, even as they promote the myth of a 60- or 40-year consensus at CIDA respecting the independence of NGOs. Harkening back to a pre-Harper paradise lost allows the NGO leaders to maintain the pretense that their organizations were untainted by government influence until now. The decline of NGO independence may



ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS IDEOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF DEVELOPMENT NGOS IS THAT THEY LEAD US TO THINK ABOUT DEVELOPMENT IN AN APOITICAL WAY. COUCHED IN RHETORIC ABOUT "CIVIL SOCIETY," "PARTICIPATION," AND "SOCIAL CAPITAL," NGOS OFTEN ADVANCE THE NOTION THAT POVERTY AND INEQUALITY CAN SOMEHOW BE ADDRESSED INDEPENDENTLY OF WIDER SOCIAL AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES.

have accelerated under Harper, but the tendency has been playing out for decades. In Canada, as elsewhere, development NGOs have become increasingly integrated into the foreign policy apparatus. "While there was never was a golden age of NGOs," writes Tina Wallace, "they are now becoming increasingly tied to global agendas and uniform ways of working."

### Blind spots

For years, aid critics have documented the ways in which CIDA has functioned to the benefit of Canadian multinationals while "perpetuating poverty" in the South. The role of development NGOs in this process, however, has never been systematically investigated. Due to their dependence on CIDA funds, development NGOs have become entangled in the foreign policy of the Canadian government, which is neither benevolent nor disinterested in its dealings with the Global South.

One of the most dangerous ideological effects of development NGOs is that they lead us to think about development in an apolitical way. Couched in rhetoric about "civil society," "participation," and "social capital," NGOs often advance the notion that poverty and inequality can somehow be addressed independently of wider social and political structures. As anthropologist William F. Fisher argues, "Just as the 'development apparatus' has generally depoliticized the need for development through its practice of treating local conditions as 'problems' that required technical and not structural or political solutions, it now defines problems that can be addressed via the mechanisms of NGOs rather than through political solutions."

Even more dangerous is the political blindness development NGOs can transmit about Canada's actual relations with the Global South and about their own role within those relations. NGOs' own inability to perceive these issues severely affects how they function. As veteran NGO worker Brian K. Murphy explains, "Ultimately, because they will be unable to make critical and politically aware choices, this limited vision will relegate the NGOs, at best, to a benign but marginal role in the world. At worst some will play a malignant role as agents of the very global social and economic forces that have created the conditions of poverty, deprivation, political repression, militarism, and environmental degradation experienced by billions throughout the world."

It is the malignant role of NGOs that has come more and more into focus with the latest controversy over CIDA-NGO relations. In September 2011, CIDA announced it

would be bankrolling Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) pacts between mining companies and three major NGOs (World Vision, World University Service of Canada, and Plan International) to the tune of \$26.7 million. Months later, development NGOs calling for increased regulation of Canadian mining operations abroad, such as Development and Peace and the Mennonite Central Committee Canada, learned that their CIDA funding had been eliminated or severely reduced.

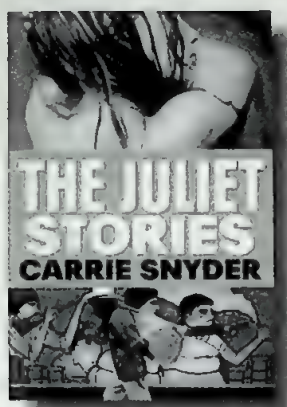
The CSR pacts were the subject of immediate criticism from local organizations. In Peru, World Vision Canada's project with Barrick Gold was immediately denounced as a transparent attempt to stifle local resistance. Miguel Palacin, the general coordinator of the Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations, wrote to World Vision Canada to decry their willingness to work with a company whose activities had already elicited strong opposition from farmers and indigenous peoples. "For this World Vision-led 'development' project to go ahead in the district of Quiruvilca in the face of concerted opposition locally and nationally would be tantamount to running a pacification program, and not a development project, in advance of the eventual destruction of a people's way of life — all for gold."

In recent years, the link between NGOs and pacification has become even more direct. In Afghanistan, NGOs have been swept up in the militarization of aid, with their projects increasingly shaped around the needs and interests of NATO's counter-insurgency strategy. In Haiti, the complicity of Quebec's NGO community in the bloody 2004 *coup d'état* has tarnished the reputation of organizations usually known for their progressive stances. Increasingly, NGOs serve as the human face of imperialism at home while mollifying opposition to Canadian geopolitical and economic interests abroad.

Thus, although the instrumentalization of NGOs in the service of Canadian mining corporations is particularly glaring, it is inscribed in a longer historical trend, one which was evident well before Harper came to power. Those seeking to build a more egalitarian world order and to express their solidarity with popular struggles in the Global South need to think about other organizational vehicles for their commitment. Internationalism is too important to be left to the NGOs. 6

*This article is excerpted from Paved with Good Intentions: Canada's Development NGOs from Idealism to Imperialism, released April 2012 by Fernwood Publishing [fernwoodpublishing.ca](http://fernwoodpublishing.ca)*





## The Juliet Stories

By Carrie Snyder  
House of Anansi Press 2012

Review by Yutaka Dirks

Carrie Snyder's new novel-in-stories begins in 1984 as Juliet Friesen's parents move their American family to Nicaragua. The country is in the grip of war. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FLSN) has overthrown the Somoza Dynasty, which had ruled the country for decades. The Sandinistas have begun "taking back from those with too much and sharing it out equally: farms, land, food, education." And now they are under attack by counter-revolutionaries (the Contras) funded by the American government.

The Friesens are members of a Christian solidarity organization called Roots of Justice. As 10-year old Juliet explains, they will bring "ordinary Americans to the border towns where Contras ambush and murder ordinary Nicaraguans. The ordinary Americans will not let that happen. They will stand, peaceful and strong, in between." The simple, graceful prose of the book's first half is crafted by a careful, knowing heart; Snyder, like Juliet, lived in Nicaragua as a child, when her parents moved there to protest the Contras.

We experience revolutionary Nicaragua as a young Juliet does: a hot, luscious place to explore - with only hints of danger. She loses herself at play in the dusty Managua streets, she becomes enamoured with a vibrant,

young peace activist who stays with her family, and she eats freshly caught fish with Nicaraguan boys holed up in a rocky cave surrounded by the ocean at high tide.

Juliet understands that the people of Nicaragua are threatened by a war being waged by her president, but because her father Bram leaves the family in the relatively safe city of Managua

**The simple, graceful prose of the book's first half is crafted by a careful, knowing heart; Snyder, like Juliet, lived in Nicaragua as a child, when her parents moved there to protest the Contras.**

while he organizes volunteers near the front lines, Juliet is able to emotionally shield herself from the violence which is "happening far away from here... to people who don't look like me."

Snyder doesn't shy away from showing us the stumbling steps that both Juliet and her mother Gloria take as they try to navigate their privilege, as in the excellent story "Borrowers"; but her interest is in the personal, not the political. The stories are Juliet's, and her stories are about her family: the

love she has for her father Bram, even as he is largely absent; the ambivalent, difficult feelings she has for her mother, physically present but emotionally opaque.

At one point, a large group of Roots of Justice volunteers gather to protest the deployment of an American warship off the Nicaraguan coast. The atmosphere is festive and later Juliet remembers them singing "Where have all the flowers gone?" She thinks, "What are the flowers, if not for plucking? ...what are soldiers, if not for war? But war is never mentioned in the song. How can the most important part be left out and the song still say everything that needs saying?"

In the first part of the novel, Snyder's prose accomplishes this same feat. Gloria's slow unravelling is painfully clear to the reader, even though Juliet is unable to comprehend it. It is precisely through Bram's absences and his sparse appearances in the narrative that the reader is able to know him, frustratingly flawed but wholly alive.

Snyder loses her assured, novelistic pace in the second half of the book when Juliet's family moves to Canada to care for her sick brother. The stories in this section examine discrete moments in her life - relationships, death, pregnancies - through largely self-contained stories separated by years. But by virtue of the much larger period covered in



the second half of the book, too much is left untold; the parts of Juliet's life that aren't shown seem so significant that what we are left with feels vaguely hollow. Thankfully, there are a few notable exceptions, including the haunting "Four Corners of a House."

What her childhood experiences in Nicaragua mean to the now-grown Juliet exist in that same territory of the unknown. When Juliet returns to the country years later for a wedding, instead of learning how she might evaluate the success of the work of the Sandinistas or of activists like her parents, Snyder brings Juliet's relationship to her mother into greater focus.

Motherhood and family are themes that run throughout the book. When they are in Nicaragua, Juliet's home is a large, open world: she develops friendships with older Roots of Justice volunteers, her father and mother's lives criss-cross with an expansive web of people. When the Friesens move to Canada and grapple with tragedy, the family shrinks to a sphere defined by blood-relation, even as they become isolated from one another. In the final pages of the book Juliet has children of her own, and envisions the family as a "wall of protection"

But is our only responsibility to our nuclear family, or should we act, as Juliet's parents did, to ensure justice and safety for others?

Snyder seems to try to answer this question in the final story, when Juliet and her children watch a young woman

being evicted across the street. Juliet replays the scene in her mind, and instead of merely watching, she imagines intervening.

"I couldn't just sit there and watch," she says to the caretaker, and points to herself with her family across the street. "You can't be there and here," he says. It is in Nicaragua, when the young Juliet attempts such tricks, that Snyder shows her talent for magic. **b**

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## On the prison-industrial complex

"Prisons do not disappear problems, they disappear human beings. And the practice of disappearing vast numbers of people from poor, immigrant, and racially marginalized communities has literally become big business."

ANGELA DAVIS

"This is, to my knowledge, the largest (prison) expansion since the 1930s. This huge building campaign represents the Americanization of Canadian corrections."

MATTHEW YEAGER

"Only one thing's sadder than remembering you were once free, and that's forgetting you were once free."

LEONARD PELTIER

## Student strike, popular struggle

"I am writing (students) this letter in order to salute you and to humbly ask that you help us follow through with your endeavour."

PAULO FREIRE

Your struggle is becoming the rebirth of the left in Quebec, asleep for years thanks to the privilege of the few and dizzied by its own prefabricated rhetoric."

CHRISTIAN NADEAU

"For myself and many other of those injured in the student conflict, the strike of 2012 is never going to be over with, so we cannot be content with so little"

FRANCIS GRENIER,  
STUDENT PROTESTER WHO LOST MOST USE OF HIS EYE AFTER BEING HIT BY A POLICE STUN GRENADE

"Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world."

*Suggestions for Quotes from the Underground are welcome and can be sent to editor@briarpatchmagazine.com*

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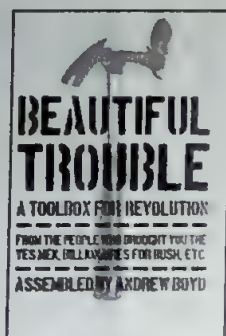
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SUSTAINER PROFILE #15:

## Adriane Paavo



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Educator and trade union activist Adriane Paavo has been with *Briarpatch* through thick and thin. Some 10 years after her mother first introduced her to the magazine in the late 1970s, Adriane went on to become the editor of *Briarpatch* for three stormy years, during which she fended off the collective wrath of business, government and mainstream media interests. She certainly deserves some of the credit for earning *Briarpatch*'s proud reputation for ferociously independent journalism. We caught up with Adriane in our hometown of Regina, where she now works as education officer for the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union.

### What do you do for fun?

I read, kayak, quilt, and am now trying to upgrade my spoken French.

### How did you first get involved with *Briarpatch*?

While I was an editor at the University of Saskatchewan's student newspaper, a former editor and *Briarpatch* supporter recruited me to write an article about a women's rights march in Saskatoon.

### Tell us about your experience working for *Briarpatch*.

It was my first "real" job and I felt like I'd won the lottery. But I spent my first months terrified that the magazine would go bankrupt. I later realized that, thanks to its supporters and track record, it would keep doggedly hanging in there. In the late 1980s, *Briarpatch* was part of a busy progressive community in Regina and Saskatchewan; it was an exciting time to be part of an early brush with a neoliberal government. In retrospect, it's clear that those guys were amateurs compared to what's come since.

### Has *Briarpatch* ever gotten you into trouble?

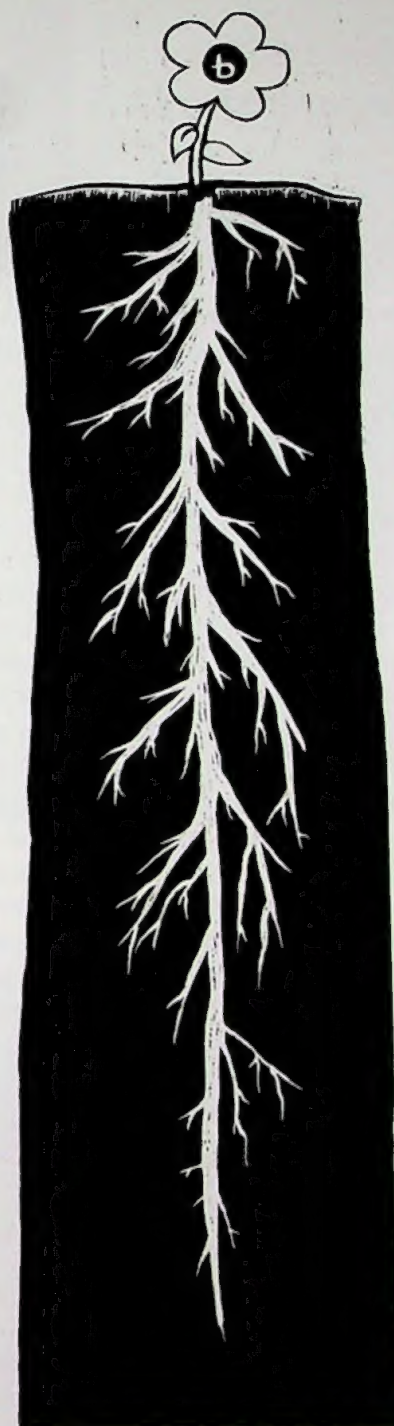
Do being sued, harassed by Revenue Canada, and getting pulled out of a passport line in a Zimbabwe airport count? Yes, *Briarpatch* has gotten me into trouble, but for good reasons, I think.



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## Why Strike Support Isn't Enough

*Lessons in solidarity organizing on the one-year anniversary of the postal strike*

By Dave Bush and Kaley Kennedy

In the current climate of government attacks on the public service and on collective bargaining across Canada, the need for community organizers to build relationships between workers, unionized and not, is now, more than ever, an essential part of mounting an effective challenge to austerity.

In the early spring of 2011, when it was clear that postal workers were heading for a strike or lockout, we were part of a small group of community organizers in Halifax who formed a solidarity group. This project was an early working group of Solidarity Halifax, a series of conferences seeking common ground on the left.

We saw this battle as the first major pan-Canadian labour struggle since the economic crisis began in 2008. We regarded the rollbacks to pensions, working conditions, and short-term disability, and the introduction of tiered wages facing postal workers as part of a strategy to use the economic crisis to cut services, increase profits, and punish public-sector workers across the country. Also, we had friends who were postal workers, and we understood the personal costs of the employer's demands.

Our small group did many things well. We developed accessible literature explaining the issues. We created downloadable posters and window signs in English and French that were used across the country to show support for workers. We used flyers and posters in a door-to-door campaign that brought activists to thousands of doorsteps to link quality public services and working conditions. We used social media aggressively. We did all of this before rotating strikes even hit Halifax. During the lockout, we organized picket line support and rallies. Our early organizing along with our pre-existing relationships with postal workers and the local labour council allowed us to do much with little.

Even though we organized before the lockout, we were still unable to get widespread support from many activists, largely because of a triage mentality on the left of only responding to the latest crisis. The fast-changing terrain of struggle created all sorts of internal organizing problems, and we could not make room for political discussion. We did a bad job of following up on contacts built on the line with community members and postal workers. Our group was trapped because our campaign was not situated in a broader strategy to build relationships and connections between organized and unorganized workers.



Community organizers are familiar with solidarity rallies and various forms of picket line support for striking workers, but our campaign attempted to shape the public perception of the workers and move our neighbours to see the connection between the struggle of these workers and the public services they depend on. The campaign needed to be part of something larger if it was to deepen the relationships we had fostered.

We want to share these lessons because any forceful fight against austerity in Canada will require a strategy that brings together public-sector workers and people who access public services. These two overlapping groups are the vast majority of Canadians and include many people who will need to be won over to the politics of solidarity in the face of the right's attempts to divide.

That does not mean that the left should claim to have all the answers. We believe that it is a mistake to tell workers the radical left would like them to participate in a general strike because we brought them soup on the line or organized a demonstration.

Workers don't owe community organizers anything. We shouldn't expect people to just agree to do what we think is a good strategy. In our solidarity work, we didn't pretend to know what was best, and we took direction from the workers. In our experience, solidarity work is most effective when it talks to people where they are, without assuming to know who people are or what their political analysis is. We didn't expect every worker to want to join our movements right away because building solidarity is a lengthy process.

Our experience leads us to believe that organizers need to be dedicated to long-term strategies to develop worker solidarity and collective analysis. This requires that we learn about union structures, the complexities of labour disputes, and the differences between unions. Knowing these intricacies, their limitations and potentials, will create a deeper understanding and lead to more effective strategies.

We as community organizers need to build structures of solidarity that can move the struggle against austerity from reactive battles to long-term strategic campaigns. We need to prepare for the attacks before they come so we can define the narrative of the battle and build strength and solidarity even in short-term defeat. To do this, community and labour activists must start building an infrastructure of solidarity capable of enacting long-term social change. ❶



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overtime pay  
annual vacation  
sick leave

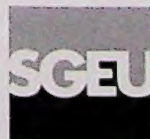
**The Saskatchewan government is  
rewriting our labour laws.**

Don't let them erase the rights and  
victories we've won together for  
Saskatchewan families.

Find out more about how the proposed  
changes would affect you. And make  
sure your voice is heard by government.

Send an email by July 31, 2012 to  
[labourlegislationLRWS@gov.sk.ca](mailto:labourlegislationLRWS@gov.sk.ca)

[IfYouLoveSaskatchewan.ca](http://IfYouLoveSaskatchewan.ca)





# **CUTS TO JOBS AND PUBLIC SERVICES ARE HARMING OUR COMMUNITIES**

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